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Myanmar: fragmentation and humanitarian crisis



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Abstract:

Myanmar is currently in the midst of a civil conflict that is not only having serious political, economic and humanitarian repercussions for local populations, but is also having a geopolitical and geostrategic impact on the whole of Southeast Asia. The internal conflict in Myanmar is causing thousands of casualties, hundreds of thousands of displaced people and widespread and indiscriminate violence that is ravaging the country.
Over the past year, significant events have taken place that have caused the conflict to undergo a profound transformation. The military Junta has lost power with the defeat in strategic enclaves, while the opposition forces -which bring together various ethnic groups and Burmese civil society- are increasing in strength as they rise to victory in both urban and rural environments.

Keywords:

Myanmar, Myanmar, Rhakine, Shan, Rohingya, OAE.

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Introduction

This chapter updates the conflict situation in Myanmar, which has already been covered in two previous editions following the coup d'état that took place in 2021. The country has been plunged into a spiral of violence that has aggravated the political and humanitarian crisis and is having important geopolitical consequences, mainly between bordering states such as Bangladesh, India and China. Despite these circumstances, the conflict in Myanmar receives little international attention and risks becoming yet another example of a forgotten conflict.



Over the past year, significant events have taken place that have caused the conflict to undergo a profound transformation. The military Junta has lost power with defeats in strategic enclaves, while the opposition forces - which include various ethnic groups and

Burmese civil society - have grown in strength as they have claimed victory in both urban and rural settings.

All this is generating a situation of instability that threatens to spread beyond Myanmar's own borders. The consequences of the conflict are particularly hard on the civilian population, both because of indiscriminate attacks and the lack of basic commodities. Migration across the border is causing countries bordering Myanmar to also suffer from the consequences of the conflict and to be concerned about the potential impact on their own security.

The armed struggle and the deep humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict coexist with the vital geostrategic interests of the region, especially China. The prolongation of the conflict in Myanmar delays and hinders its plans to establish trade corridors to the Indian Ocean and thus avoid the Strait of Malacca.

Background

On February 1, 2021, Myanmar's military, known as the Tadmadaw, carried out a coup d'état on the grounds that the results of the November 2020 election were fraudulent.

While most of the anti-Junta and pro-democracy resistance has coalesced around the National Unity Government (NUG), there are also Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) that have seized the opportunity to strengthen their historic struggle against central power and for greater autonomy.

Myanmar's military Junta has to deal with these two forms of armed opposition and their combinations. In the days leading up to the coup, taking advantage of the uprisings by pro-democracy opponents, the EAOs chose to renew their armed struggle in order to pursue their claims for recognition and autonomy and to try to regain the territories they had lost in previous years. Other ethnic groups, however, have remained neutral, not supporting the military regime but not violently opposing it either.

In addition to this historical ethnic struggle, the military Junta has to contend with fighters from the pro-democracy civilian uprising, where the Bamar ethnic group is predominant. After the coup d'état, civilians formed local resistance groups known as the People's Defense Force (PDF). Some of these groups formed the armed wing of the NUG party,

which is considered the legitimate government of Myanmar after winning the 2020 elections.

This diversity of actors has made the conflict more complex, as there are multiple strands of armed struggle due to the geography and the different associations that have been generated between all the groups opposed to the military regime.

The conflict has spread across the country and contrary to expectations, the territorial gains made in the last year by the resistance to the military Junta are unprecedented (Mio Hein, 2024), demonstrating that the ethnic groups and the PDF are increasingly coordinated, have more financial and material means at their disposal and, most importantly, have the support of the civilian population.

When General Min Aung Hlaing came to power after the coup d'état, he did not expect the population's consolidated support for democracy to be so strong and deeply rooted. Nor did he count on the high resilience shown by the ethnic armies which, far from being divided and weakened, have been able to coordinate to increase their strength, even with the NUG government's armed groups.

The conflict in Myanmar is not a civil war; it is the uprising of a people, with differences but amalgamated, against the power of the military Junta. It is in this context that one can understand the success, for example, of Operation 1027[1] , an offensive launched in October 2023 in northern Shan State involving all three members of the Brotherhood Alliance - the Arakan Army (AA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA)[2] and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) - in coordination and with the PDF (Htoo Zan, 2023). The significance of this operation is that it was the first time the Brotherhood Alliance coordinated militarily and openly with the NUG (Myo Hein, 2023).

During Operation 1027, allied militias simultaneously attacked several army, police and other security force positions in northern Shan State. The military Junta suffered heavy human and material losses, including fighter jets, helicopters and armored vehicles. The Brotherhood Alliance and its resistance allies throughout the country also captured arms

[1] So called because it took place on 27 October 2023.
[2] Also known as the Kokang Armed Ethnic Group, whose members are Mandarin-speaking Han Chinese and natives of Kokang.

and ammunition caches, as well as important military bases and strategic cities (Htoo Zan, 2024).

This victory was a turning point in the conflict as it inspired other resistance groups, including other ethnic armies, to launch coordinated attacks against the military Junta's army (Htoo Zan, 2024). The escalation continued with operations 1107 and 1111 on November 7 and 11 by other ethnic organizations in Eastern Kayah State. What was new was an unprecedented level of coordination and the use of commercial drones to attack targets, such as infrastructure and trucks transporting goods. There was also a notable increase in the number of fronts, although major cities such as Yangon, Mandalay and Naypyidaw were not involved in the fighting.

All these coordinated attacks drastically reduced the military Junta's zone of influence, limiting it to a shrinking space in the center of the country (Myo Hein, 2024b).

Three months after Operation 1027, China succeeded in negotiating the Kumming truce. According to this agreement, the opposition groups renounced offensive attacks on military camps or cities under Junta control. For its part, the military Junta pledged not to carry out air strikes and not to use heavy weapons. However, the truce was short-lived. In June, the military and rebels resumed fighting, carrying out Operation 1027 (II) and Operation Shan-Man, with negative results for the military Junta government as the rebels took the strategic town of Lashio and also weakened General Hiaing's position within the military regime itself (Aljazeera, 2024).

The military Junta's army has suffered significant losses of ground troops due to desertions, casualties and surrenders. As a result, the total number of combat troops has been reduced to 130,000 and the auxiliary police and militia forces that supported the military Junta comprise about 70,000 troops, compared to earlier estimates of at least 300,000 (Myo Hein, 2024).

This decrease in troop numbers prompted the military Junta to enforce the compulsory conscription law that had been inactive since 2010 (Myo Hein, 2024b), which has caused panic among the Burmese population. Perceiving military service as a likely death sentence, thousands of people have fled to areas liberated by the resistance or migrated across borders, aggravating Myanmar's almost structural refugee problem (UNHCR,

2021). Others have joined the resistance forces fighting the Junta regime (UNHCR, 2021).

The implementation of this law has increased regional instability. The spread of armed conflict throughout the country has deprived communities of basic necessities and access to essential services.

The people of Myanmar have suffered serious human rights violations, more than 26,000 people have been detained, and more than 8,000 civilians have been killed. There has been massive displacement due to fighting and indiscriminate attacks on the civilian population (De Riedmatten, 2024).

The military Junta is using its famous “four-cuts” strategy in parts of the country that have not been directly targeted in previous military operations, mainly in Mon State (Mon and Quadrini, 2023). This strategy is designed to cut off food sources, funds, information and recruits (Mon and Quadrini, 2023). For this reason, the Junta has been accused of using hunger as a weapon of war (Firstpost, 2024).

Current situation

The recent developments described above have resulted in a different dynamic in the conflict compared to last year. The military Junta is losing battles in several strategic locations as ethnic groups and the PDF are acting in an unprecedentedly coordinated and innovative way (Paliwal, 2024). Fighting has intensified along the borders with China, India and Bangladesh.

The Junta promised to hold elections in 2025, for which it announced a population census. These so-called elections have been branded a sham, and their outcome is unlikely to be accepted, at least by Western countries (Reuters, 2024).

Meanwhile, Aung San Suu Kyi, the winner of the 2021 elections that led to the coup, remains in prison for crimes brought by the military Junta. Pope Francis has called for her release and has even proposed that she could be received in the Vatican (EFE, 2024).

The desperation to lose the war makes the Junta responsible for real war crimes with indiscriminate airstrikes against civilians and non-military targets (Frontier, 2024). It is estimated that between April 1, 2023, and June 30 there have been 613 civilian deaths

from airstrikes, an increase of 739% compared to the previous fifteen months (United Nations Human Rights, 2024).

Soldiers have started deserting and the military Junta is having trouble improving its recruitment capacity (Paliwal, 2024). Furthermore, to encourage these desertions, the NUG has built camps to help deserters transition to civilian life (Paliwal, 2024).

The Arakan Army has already taken control of most of Rakhine State, including the border with Bangladesh, and is likely to seize the capital, Sittwe, and the strategic port of Kyaukpyu (Horsey, 2024).

In just a few months, the Arakan Army has created the largest area in Myanmar under the control of a non-state armed group, both in terms of size and population, and is now poised to take over the security of almost all of Rakhine and the Arakan Army may even be forging a proto-state of more than a million people on the Myanmar-Bangladesh border (Bloomberg News, 2024).

The cost of their success has been high, especially for civilians (International Crisis Group, 2024). In response to this victory, the military Junta has begun arresting dozens of people for sending supplies to the rebel zone (RFA Burmese, 2024).

In regions where pressure on the military is at its limit, the military Junta is hiring private militias and border guard forces (BGF) to attack resistance fighters and terrorize civilians. These support forces are paid for with cash generated from drug trafficking or by allowing illicit businesses to operate (Paliwal, 2024).

In the face of this Junta approach, opposition groups are providing food and medicine to the population and have even gone a step further by creating parallel governance systems. For example, the Arakan army has set up courts, police mechanisms and medical clinics that are enabling humanitarian aid agencies to operate on the ground. It is also providing food and medicine to the civilian population, both Buddhists and Muslims, in the state of Rakine (Paliwal, 2024).

The capture of the northern town of Lashio by the resistance on August 3, marks a turning point in Myanmar's conflict. After a month of fierce fighting, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and allied resistance forces captured this crucial stronghold in northern Shan State, dealing a major blow to the beleaguered Junta. This

represents more than just the loss of a major city. It is the first time a regional military command has been captured by resistance forces (Myo Hein, 2024c).

Humanitarian crisis: displaced persons and Rohingyas

The widespread conflict situation across the country - with further deterioration in northern Shan State, the Mandalay region and Rakhine State - is causing further population displacement. In addition, since late June, torrential monsoon rains and overflowing rivers have submerged several states and regions, exacerbating already severe humanitarian needs and affecting an estimated 393,000 people. Across the country, an estimated three million people are internally displaced and many of the newly displaced are living without adequate shelter during the monsoon season (OCHA, 2024).

Of all the displaced, the special situation of the Rohingyas trying to flee Myanmar to enter Bangladesh is particularly noteworthy. Considered stateless, they are now joining the armed forces of both the military Junta (International Crisis Group, 2024) and opposition groups. Because of their active participation in the conflict, they have become targets of attacks (Myanmar Closed Consultations, 2024).

External actors

Three years after the coup and as the conflict in Myanmar becomes more complex with increased violence and delayed elections, international actors are developing strategies on how to deal with a crisis that threatens to destabilize the whole of Southeast Asia, especially the bordering countries.

China

Myanmar has been a strategically important nation for China because of its abundant resources, its geographical position on the eastern coast of the Bay of Bengal and its land border. Myanmar and China share a 2129 km long border. Several strategic points where trade transactions take place are located such as Muse, Lwegel, Chinshwehaw (Lintner, 2023). The value of trade at three key border stations now controlled by ethnic

organizations amounts more than USD 9.4 billion, which constitutes almost 91% of the total value of cross-border trade between Myanmar and China (ISP, 2024).

Relations between Myanmar and China have often been described as *Pauk Phaw*, a brotherly relationship, due to their historical and cultural political, economic and diplomatic ties[3] . China's main concerns in Myanmar are the country's stability, especially the porous regions bordering Yunnan province, and the advancement of mega-projects associated with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) such as the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) that includes a deep-water port in Kyaukphyu, an industrial park and a high-speed rail link between Kunming in China and Mandalay in Myanmar. These infrastructures give China access to the Indian Ocean and thus avoid the major *chokepoint* of the Strait of Malacca. The gas pipeline connecting Yunnan province to the Andaman Sea has been built parallel to the railway line.



[3] See: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the P.R.C.R. (mfa.gov.cn)

Second, China needs to prevent Myanmar from becoming a failed state, leading to trade disruption and refugee influxes. This is why it does not hesitate to negotiate with whoever holds power over a given territory in Myanmar, be it the military Junta. Despite China's characteristic policy of non-interference in other countries' internal affairs, the reality is that China is playing a more or less active role in the conflict depending on its interests. For example, in Rakhine state, China argues that the conflict and the humanitarian crisis generated by it are internal affairs of Myanmar and that the *Rohingya* crisis should be dealt with constructively between Myanmar and Bangladesh, both of which are considered friends of China (Security Council, 2024).

A different situation is its interference in the conflict in other Myanmar border states, where China's position is much more active[4] . It is in China's interest to stabilize the border and move the fighting away from its territories of interest to ensure the stability of the CMEC, the security of Chinese nationals and to create a space in which to suppress cyber-scam networks (Riezu Tévar, 2024).

Since the coup, these activities have expanded because of the military's laxity in dealing with them as they need the support of ethnic armed groups. In addition, the thriving business of racketeering operations has become one of the militia's main revenue generators. In 2023, the number of scammers working in Myanmar was estimated at 120,000 people and the total annual revenue generated by them was estimated at USD 15.3 billion, which is roughly equivalent to a quarter of Myanmar's GDP in 2023 (Paing, 2024).

In May 2023 China called on the Board to eradicate cyber-scam centers where Chinese work illegally, recruited by mafias. China's unwillingness to launch a full-scale initiative against these centers provided a golden opportunity for resistance in the form of the Chinese government's tacit approval of Operation 1027 at the end of 2023 (Bicker, 2024). The Three Brotherhoods Alliance stated at the beginning of the 1027 operation that the elimination of cyber scam centers was one of the main reasons for starting the offensive (Paing, 2024). Indeed, the success of the 1027 operation cannot be understood without China's active involvement in the conflict by supporting the Junta resistance movement

[4] See: https://www.iseas.edu.sg/media/event-highlights/webinar-on-myanmars-relations-with-russia-and-china-convenience-or-co-optation

in order to strengthen its influence on Myanmar's border to control it in its favor and free its nationals from the cyber-scam centers (Reuters, 2024b).

Thus, China is in a Catch-22 situation. On the one hand, the Asian giant is an important ally and arms supplier to the Junta (AFP, 2024) and is the least interested in facilitating a collapse of the military regime, which could accelerate chaos leading to the political and territorial fragmentation of Myanmar into multiple ethnic states. Such a situation would be unfavorable because it could lead to the collapse of the Burmese economy with serious consequences for Chinese investment in Myanmar.

The Junta continues to maintain control over the nation's crucial state infrastructure. To date, it controls international airports, seaports and economically important areas such as the commercial capital Rangoon, which also has the largest number of foreign embassies. This is why China maintains high-level interactions with the Junta despite a recent report by the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M) indicating that the Junta lacks effective territorial control, with eleven of the eighteen townships along the Sino-Myanmar border entirely under resistance (Paing, 2024).

On the other hand, China also maintains ties with Myanmar's ethnic armed groups that control territory near its border and now believes they could be better guarantors of border stability than the military Junta forces, especially in Shan State. However, China must prevent these armed groups, such as the MNDAA, from aligning with other opposition forces, such as the PDF, because it perceives them to be US-backed (Aye, 2024).

To prevent ethnic militias from turning to Western support, China has tightened controls on the movement of consumer goods and medicines across its border with Myanmar (Myanmar Now, 2024). China has cut off electricity, water and communications to the MNDAA-controlled town of Laukkai and restricted trade in goods such as medicines to the entire Northern Shan state. In response, the MNDAA has already declared that it has no alliance with the NUG armed group PDF (Scott Mathieson, 2024). The repercussions of these restrictive measures are having a direct impact on the population and China must also manage the anti-China sentiment that is being generated appropriately.

China is also engaged in intense diplomatic activity, based on a three-pronged approach: avoiding civil strife in Myanmar, avoiding outside interference, and keeping Myanmar as

a member of ASEAN. All of this is aimed at achieving a peace process that avoids anarchic chaos in Myanmar that would threaten its commercial interests in the region.

Bangladesh

The rapid developments in Rakhine state have had repercussions across the border in Bangladesh, already hit with a crisis such as the refugee camps housing almost a million Rohingya.[5]

Relations between the Bangladesh government and the Arakan Army have deteriorated sharply since early 2024. Security conditions have worsened further as Rohingya armed groups conduct recruitment drives in the camps, first trying to enlist Rohingya men voluntarily and, when that largely failed, resorting to forced recruitment. Most of the recruits appear to have been transferred to the Myanmar army (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

As the Arakan Army advances into northern Rakhine State, it has faced increasing challenges in managing its relationship with the Bangladeshi authorities, both with the government of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and with the Council headed by Muhammad Yunus following her ouster in August. The possibility of the Arakan Army establishing full control of the border has changed the outlook for the Rohingyas. Bangladesh has pressed the Arakan Army to meet with Rohingya leaders to advance negotiations on the repatriation of refugees to areas controlled by this armed group, but this option does not appear to be feasible at present (Human Rights Watch, 2024b).

Russia

Since the 2021 coup, Russia has replaced China as Myanmar's main arms supplier[6] . SAC's increasing reliance on air power in the ongoing conflict in Myanmar has led to

[5] See: https:
[6] See: https://www.iseas.edu.sg/media/event-highlights/webinar-on-myanmars-relations-with-russia-and-china-convenience-or-co-optation/

greater reliance on Russian-made aircraft and less reliance on Chinese-made aircraft. SAC is also procuring jet fuel from Russia.

For the leader of Myanmar's military Junta, Min Aung Hlaing, Russia is like a *friend forever*, while China and India accord them the status of *close friends* (Storey, 2023). Indeed, to reciprocate the Kremlin's solidarity after the coup, the Burmese military Junta immediately backed Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the only ASEAN member state to do so (Storey, 2023).

For Russia, Myanmar does not represent a threat to international security and therefore avoids public discussion of the conflict in the UN Council, arguing that Western delegations are trying to politicize the situation in Myanmar (Security Council, 2024).

USA

US policy towards Myanmar since the military coup has focused on restoring democracy, holding the military accountable for its crimes and providing humanitarian assistance to a vulnerable population (Myres, 2024).

In November 2022, the US Congress passed the Burma Act[7] which states that the United States supports the Burmese people in their struggle for democracy, human rights and justice. Since the coup, the US has provided $400 million to support the pro-democracy movement (Myres , 2024). However, implementation of this law is proceeding slowly.

The first key provision of the Burma Act allows for "programs to strengthen federalism within and among Myanmar's ethnic states, including non-lethal assistance to ethnic armed organizations. Non-lethal assistance includes: radios for command and control, laptops suitable for harsh conditions, GPS systems, satellite phones, bulletproof vests, civilian drones and spare parts, as well as early warning systems for resistance actors and civilians against military air strikes" (Myres, 2024).

From a national interest perspective, the US has an unmissable opportunity to support the establishment of a stable, federal, inclusive and democratic government in Myanmar (Myres, 2024). However, such a desired federal state will not be easy to achieve. The increased territorial and political power of the various ethnic groups brought about by

[7] See: https:

armed struggle and external support may lead Myanmar towards fragmentation rather than reunification into a federal state. In this case, China may find it very difficult to make further progress in its trade corridors and BRI consolidation by dealing with multiple actors. In a context of geopolitical and economic rivalry between the two powers, it would be the US that would gain the most from the situation.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

Since the beginning of the conflict, ASEAN was postulated as the regional organization that should determine the best way to achieve peace and return to a democratic government. However, the Five-Point Consensus (5PC)[8] , agreed in Jakarta in April 2021 by ASEAN member states, including the Myanmar military Junta, remains unimplemented and has only been partially implemented.

Despite the hopes pinned on ASEAN, the reality is that this organization has neither the tools nor the track record to resolve a crisis of the magnitude facing Myanmar (Root, 2024).

The Five-Point Consensus remains the main reference for addressing the political crisis in Myanmar and despite the efforts of ASEAN Special Envoy Alounkeo Kittikhoun to resolve the crisis in Myanmar, progress is very limited

India

On March 1, 2024, K. Vanlalvena, a member of India's Upper House of Parliament and representative of the Indian state of Mizoram, met with the commander of the Arakan Army (AA) in Myanmar's Chin state to raise two issues: the flow of refugees from Myanmar to Mizoram and an unfinished road network that hinders India's plans to build land and sea connectivity with Southeast Asia. This meeting marked a potential turning point in India's geopolitical strategy in Myanmar (Yumlembam, 2024).

[8] Adopted by ASEAN in April 2021, the 5CP called for an immediate cessation of violence, constructive dialogue between all parties and humanitarian assistance, among other measures.

Like China, India faces an imminent choice between remaining committed to the Junta or strengthening its relations with Myanmar's ethnic armed organizations (EAO) to protect its strategic and economic interests (Pande, 2023).

Myanmar is India's gateway to Southeast Asia and therefore essential for the development of its Act East policy[9] and the projection of its capabilities in the region[10] . One of the main continental routes is the ongoing India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway (IMT Highway) project. The highway, which is approximately 1,360 kilometers long, connects Manipur in the northeast with Mae Sot in Thailand via Mandalay and Bagan in Myanmar (Goswami, 2024). In addition to this highway, the electricity connection between these countries is also a priority objective for India (Pande, 2023).

In terms of refugee influx, airstrikes by Myanmar military Junta forces have resulted in hundreds of deaths and forced tens of thousands of civilians to flee their homes and livelihoods. The UN estimates that more than 60,000 have fled to the Indian border states of Mizoram and Manipur, while another 61,000 remain internally displaced (Campbell and Nilian, 2024).

The constant interaction between the two sides of the border has made difficult the administration of border control and was reflected by the existence of a Free Movement Regime (FMR) on the border. However, the Indian administration announced in February 2024 its intention to end the FMR and build a wall as a pre-emptive measure in the face of escalating conflict in both Myanmar and Manipur state (Campbell and Nillian, 2024). The reconsideration of the FMR is based not only on the increasing influx of Myanmar nationals after the coup in 2021, but also on the increase in drug smuggling and trafficking as customs control by the Myanmar military Junta has decreased (Pant and Banerjee, 2024). In this way, India aims to ensure the country's internal security and maintain the demographic structure of India's northeastern states bordering Myanmar (Singh, 2024).

[9] The Act East Policy (AEP) aims to promote economic development in northeast India and beyond by fostering closer ties with East and Southeast Asian nations.
[10] See: *The Middle Link: China and India's Interests in Myanmar and its Implications for Indo-Pacific Geopolitics*. Author: Dr. Sara Álvarez Quintáns.

UN

Despite the serious conflict situation in Myanmar, the UN Security Council is unable to reach agreement on the adoption of a resolution to help end the hostilities. The Council took an important first step towards improving the lives of people in Myanmar with Resolution 2669 in 2022, but little progress has been made since its adoption.

The Security Council complements ASEAN's work by supporting its efforts to implement its Five-Point Consensus on Myanmar with the aim of moving towards a political solution to the Myanmar crisis. But the lack of effective implementation of this agreement is encouraging increased pressure within the Security Council for a resolution. In fact, a proposal has been tabled by the UK. Among other issues, the initial draft of the resolution calls for an end to illicit arms transfers, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access, an immediate end to violence, and dialogue between relevant parties (Lederer, 2024). But given the need for consensus and the fact that Russia has declared that the conflict in Myanmar is not a threat to international security (Security Council, 2024), it is unlikely that progress will be made along these lines.

Recent Australia's appointment of Julie Bishop as its special envoy for Myanmar at least fills the gap in the negotiation and update on the Myanmar situation. Since her appointment in April, Bishop has held a series of meetings with regional officials and representatives of China, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia and Thailand (Myanmar Closed Consultations, 2024).

The UN Human Rights Council has also expressed concern about the crisis in Myanmar, about widespread abuses by the military and armed opposition groups, including forced recruitment of members of the *Rohingya* community and their use as human shields (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2024).

The Secretary-General continues to call for a unified international response and encourages Member States, in particular neighboring countries, to use their influence to open humanitarian channels in line with international principles, end the violence and seek a comprehensive political solution leading to an inclusive and peaceful future for Myanmar.

Myanmar has become a global epicenter of methamphetamine and opium production and home to rapidly expanding international cyber-smuggling operations, especially in border

areas. For the Secretary-General, the situation in Myanmar represents a rampant crisis of human trafficking and illicit trade with global implications and calls for greater international unity and support for the region (Security Council, 2024).

Perspectives

The defeats of the military Junta's armed forces and the current economic and humanitarian crises in Myanmar are calling into question Ming Aung Hlaing's leadership. It is possible that he could be replaced in the coming months, although at present it is not known who will be able to replace him.

The willingness to coordinate between the Brotherhood Alliance and the NUD - such as that achieved to carry out Operation 1027 - can be seen as an example of the kind of cooperation needed to build a federal republic in Myanmar. This shared commitment to defeating the military Junta could provide a solid basis for building a future without a military government.

However, achieving this goal - also shared by the international community - is not an easy task, even with the fall of the military Junta, mainly because Myanmar has never been a homogenous entity, but an ethnically fragmented state.

It is difficult to predict what the claims of ethnic groups operating on the periphery of the country will be, as they may be more interested in establishing permanent ethnic homelands - on the model of the Wa state along the border with China - than in fighting for control of the center of the country where the capital and the majority of the Burmese population is located.

In this context, it is more difficult to move towards a federal model if the military Junta is eventually defeated. The ethnic groups will not relinquish the authority they have gained through their victories over the military, and which has caused so much civilian damage. They will maintain their armies to defend territory and above all control of natural resources and sources of income derived from illicit sources such as drug production, casinos and racketeering centers.

Following pressure from China on its border, cybercrime operations are likely to move further south, near the Thai-Myanmar border.

At the same time, both China and India seek influence in each of the ethnic states that are emerging after the military Junta's defeats for geostrategic reasons. China's vital commercial interests are very much at stake in the conflict, despite its policy of non-interference. At the moment, China is curbing cooperation between certain ethnic armed groups and the civilian government's PDF, under suspicion that the latter is receiving US support.

The consolidation of the commercial and communication projects that both powers have in Myanmar may encounter many difficulties due to the different ethnic territorial authorities that could be established and through which these infrastructures pass. They will have to carry out different negotiations, with different concessions to try not to break any territorial link in the infrastructures that cross Myanmar, from east to west, for China and from north to south for India.

Bangladesh seeks to see the rapid return of up to one million Rohingya refugees. Their situation now depends on the Arakan Army and its political arm rather than the central power of the military Junta.

The humanitarian crisis in Myanmar is increasingly being supported by the international community, but more funds will be needed to address the needs of those displaced by the conflict and also by the paralysis of trade at the borders that is depriving people of basic commodities.

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ANNEX.

Table 1. Chronology of the conflict

Chronology of the conflict	
2020	General elections. The NLD won a majority of the total number of seats in the national parliament.
2021	January 31. Military declared a state of emergency. February 1. Coup d'état. April 24. Signing of the Five-Point Agreement. September 7. The NUG declares a defensive war against the military Junta.
2022	Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visits Myanmar. September 7. Min Aung Hlaing meets Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of the Moscow-organized Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok, Russia. December 22. UN Security Council Resolution 2669 (2022).

2023	March 29 - Myanmar's ruling military Junta dissolves the National League for Democracy, the political party of former State Councilor Aung San Suu Kyi. September 5. ASEAN Summit. October 27. Launch of operation 1027. November 7. Launch of operation 1107. November 11. Launch of Operation 1111.
2024	January 10, 2024. First meeting of Asean Special Envoy Alounkeo Kittikhoun with the Myanmar military Junta. April 5, 2024. Appointment of Julie Bishop as UN Special Envoy for Myanmar. June 25. Second round of Operation 1027. June 27. Operation Shan-Man. August 3. Taking of Lashio.

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